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OF

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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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GOD'S CHARACTER
VIEWED
THROUGH MAN'S HIGHER NATURE.

"If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him."—Luke XI., 13.

If one wished to bring into contrast the God of the material world with the God that is revealed in Jesus Christ, I know of no other passage that would give a better opportunity, if taken with its context. There is a contrast which oftentimes becomes most painful between the God whom we should believe in if we interpreted physical, material nature only, and that God in whom we have been taught to believe, and whose attributes are expounded in the Word. One can scarcely conceive of things more opposite. To be sure, science, alone, teaches us power, arrangement, order, and therein universal wisdom; but from the course of the world, and from the method of creation, and the methods of procedure, in so far as they are applied to the great elements of the globe and to organized material nature, we learn nothing of the divine disposition. Yet in Christ, while we learn but little of the divine method in government with regard to the great material globe, we are taught much in respect to the divine nature in regard to interior feelings and dispositions. What men call Nature would present to us a god of great power and governing wisdom, but with no apparent heart. The Bible, on the other hand, reveals to us God with an infinite depth of feeling. And it is this contrast of the revealed nature of God with that which we find outside of revelation, that fills many men with wonder. For, if you accept the idea of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, as a God of providence, caring for the world and its inhabitants by grace, as a God of tender disposition—of pity, and mercy, and gentleness, and kindness, and love, and helpfulness—and then attempt to apply it to the process of affairs, and the development of nations, and the course of individual fami-

SUNDAY MORNING, Jan 7, 1872. Lesson: Luke XVIII., 1-14. Hymns (Plymouth Collection) Nos. 132, 865.

lies, or of persons out of families, it is a perplexity, to say the least. The two do not seem, in speculation, to fit, or to grow one out of the other. There seems to be in nature no God that has being. There seems to be in nature (speaking of the material globe, and excluding man himself, of whom I shall speak in a moment) absolute coldness. In nature, none of those methods by which we are accustomed to have intercourse with each other are employed. None of those elements of pity which we see mingling in human life distill from nature upon us—or only germs, rudiments of them. In nature there is no fruitfulness except in order, power, and such like elements.

Yet, in the New Testament, we find all figures exhausted to prove how good, how tender and how gentle God is. There is nothing that man has learned to esteem; there is nothing that seems glorious in beauty, that has not been appropriated in some form or other of parable, or symbol, or figure, to describe God's loving kindness; and we come all glowing out of the Bible with an idea of God, which, when we attempt to find it in nature, is not to be found. The stars do not show it, and the earth does not show it. We there learn his "eternal power and God-head," as the apostle phrases it; but his heart-ship, and soul-ship we do not find there.

The revelation of Christ as giving his life for a sinful world, is then, painted on the background of such a constitution of the outward world, simply astounding. The idea presented in the revelation of God is so utterly different from that of the natural world, the material globe, and its administration, that when one is set over against the other a reflective nature cannot but pause and marvel. It is a question of difficulty, and has been one of perplexity: If God be Father, where is the evidence of it outside of the statement of the Bible? If the divine government is an administration of love and mercy, what mean all the other tokens which the world is full of? If we go out and look, and see how things actually are, in the outward world, we go from step to step deeper and deeper into trouble. There is blood; there are tears; there is heart-rending; there is death; there are separations; there are disappointments; there are revulsions; there is that awful and universal constitution of pain—pains that cannot be numbered, and whose degrees cannot be measured. All the earth is declared to have groaned and travailed in pain until now. We see this; and from the contemplation of such facts, one comes to the Word of God which speaks of the divine Being as the infinite Father, who, rather than that men should suffer, suffers himself, bowing his head from the eternal glory above, and coming down to earth to suffer for men, and with them,

and showing them the way to hope, to mercy, and to salvation. What is the meaning of this contrariety?

The two testimonies, then, as to the personal helpfulness of God, —that of physical nature, and that which Christ gives—would seem not to run together. We are not apt to suppose they do. The solution, in so far as it can be found at all, lies, I think, in Human Life—in our own souls; in our personal experience. Men talk of Nature; but nature has not been consulted at all when we consult that which is outside of ourselves only. I have been a part of nature, and you have been a part of nature. It is the testimony, not of the sky and the clouds, not of light and electricity, not of summer and winter, not of material bodies subject to material laws, that we must seek. These are only a part, and the lowest part, the rudimentary part, of nature. Nature means all that the natural world is, and all that mankind are; and the most important part of nature is the human disposition, human faculties, and human life itself. We are not to say that we have the revelation of God's character in nature until we have taken, not only that which we find in organic matter and organized material, but also human experience in all its various relations to society, to the household and to individuals. And the final reconciliation of the problem, if it is to be found at all, is to be found in this Nature completed in Man, and not in nature outside of man.

The highest part of nature, then, is man's own experience. We are to derive our notions of divine life, not from what we see going on upon the shell, but from that which we find evolved in the process of growth through which God is putting the race itself; from the tendencies, the drifts, the developments in human life, and the directions of them; from all those elements of preciousness, and beauty, and joy which are evolved out of human consciousness. What if electricity teaches us nothing more? What if there is nothing in summer and winter which gives us a knowledge of the nature of God? There is not the place to look for it. There is another nature besides this outward nature. There is a nature inside of man, in the living consciousness of men; and we are to go there for facts, as much as to the fields, or the heavens, or the seasons. There we shall find an evolution of emotions; where did they come from? Why have we thought-power that the flowers have not? Why have we emotive power that the insects have not? Whence came that life which flames in genius, and which pours itself abroad in all the munificence of beneficence the world around, and has for ages? Is not that nature? Are not these facts which we are to recognize, and from which we are to deduce some concep-

tion of what the divine nature is? Are we to interpret from matter, what God is? Not at all. We are to interpret it from men.

There is a grander nature than animal nature. It is human nature. In that we are to search for the evidences of divine character and divine procedure. Not that we are able, as yet, to read it perfectly; not that we are able, as yet, to frame a whole scheme, or answer all difficulties. For, we are yet ourselves so imperfect, and society is so imperfect, that the whole of God, and of what God means, doth not yet appear, either in the individual or in the race.

There has been a prejudice against what is called *anthropomorphism*—that is, framing a conception of God by borrowing the likeness of man in its more literal form; the presenting God in the human form; framing an idea of Deity from the experiences of human life and the human soul. Philosophy has often repudiated this. But without it I apprehend there can be no God conceivable. Outside of that which we are ourselves experiencing, or conceiving through our own minds, there is no knowledge; and if we are to frame a God for ourselves at all, it must be anthropomorphic—that is, one that is to be interpreted from analogy, or in parallelism, with our own nature and experience.

The great error of anthropomorphism, or the interpreting of God from the experiences of human nature, has consisted in this: that men have ascribed to their Deities their lower nature, while, as yet, they were undeveloped, uncultured; while, as yet, they had no moral richness or excellence. Men were accustomed to ascribe to their Gods, when they attempted to frame them, attributes from the worst of themselves; the passions of men, their appetites, their rage, their anger, their jealousies, their lower nature, have been taken. The mistake consists, not in inferring God's nature from something in ourselves, but in taking the wrong part of ourselves, and interpreting the Divine nature from that. It is the higher nature of man that furnishes the ideal conceptions of God. Without this higher form of anthropomorphism there is no Christianity; there is no practical and comforting view of God; there is no companionable Father in heaven; there is nothing left for the heart; there is nothing left to excite sympathy; there is nothing left for love, for gratitude, or sweet affection. God, thought of only as he is interpreted through the alembic of scientific research upon the material globe, is but an engineer. The world is a mill—not a mansion. It is only when we retreat from the outer course of things to the inner—to that which we all admit to be the flower of nature, man; and man's interior, and the best part of it; it is only when we come to the least unfolded though the most progressive elements of man, that we

approach the secret things of nature, and have any data by which to interpret what God's nature is, and what his government is to be. All that which is best and noblest in human experience in the ages of the world—that part of nature it is, which furnishes our types, our analogies, our facts for inference.

Consider, then, the use which is here made of human nature by our Saviour in the interpretation of God. By direct analogy our Master taught us to infer the nature of God. If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, being selfish, being imperfect, give good gifts to your children; if parental love, poor as it is, is not so poor but that it will give to the child what the child wants and asks for within the limits of his own benefit; if ye being low down in giving-power do these things; if it is simply impossible for a child to appeal to a father or a mother for necessary things without a response, and without the benefit—how much more shall your Father in heaven give you the things which you need and petition for? If you give thought, and sympathy, and affection, and yearning and desire to those that are dependent upon you; if that is the quality of human nature; if that is the characteristic of the mother-nature and the father-nature; if it is that which the heart tends to do always, the world around, alike among savages, barbarians and civilized people, among the unlettered and educated; if it is the universal tendency of parental human nature to leap to supply the want of the child—Jesus stands and says, "Your Father is ineffably more a father than you are. If you, being evil, low, undeveloped, imperfect in every way, seamed and veined with selfishness, know how to do so much good, how much more shall your heavenly Father do good, giving the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"—or, as it is stated in another place, "Give good gifts to those that ask him?"

Here, then, is our Master taking the great facts of human experience, and laying them as a part of the argument over against the divine nature, saying, "This which in you exists in the small, in the miniature, in the imperfect condition, exists in God in transcendent measure, magnified, augmented, deepened, enriched, more fruitful and more powerful." This was the reasoning of the Saviour. Then he reversed it, and talked as in the context immediately preceding:

"Which of you" [it was when he was teaching them how to pray; and this is evidently a part of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke gives one part of that sermon, and Matthew the other part. There are many passages in Luke which go to show, evidently, to me, that there are parts which Luke has

given far more accurately than Matthew. And this was spoken after the Lord's Prayer was given]. "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth."

There is mercy even in selfishness. The man will not give his friend because his heart springs up with a desire to help him; but rather than have the man knocking, and insisting upon the favor being granted him which he craves, and troubling him all night, from this selfish consideration he will give him as much as he wants.

"And I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you."

Here, however, the thread, the important connection, breaks. There is a parallel to this in the eighteenth chapter of Luke, which we read in the opening service, where an account is given of the unjust judge to whom a certain widow went and said, "Avenge me of mine adversary." Probably the man of whom she complains has got her little property upon which she depends for her support; and she has sought redress, and failed to obtain it; and finally she goes to the judge, and relates to him her grievances, and asks him to bring her enemy to justice.

"He would not for awhile; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet, because this woman troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."

Here, from the meanest of all possible motives—from a sense of comfort, and not from a sense of justice; not because he cares for her suffering, but because he cares for the suffering which he will have to endure if he does not grant her request, this man does that which is right. To save himself from being annoyed by the widow's importunity, he says, "I will do it."

Here are the two instances: a man will not give bread to his friend because he needs it, but from selfish considerations, because he wants to be let alone so that he can go to sleep, he will give it to him; and a judge will not grant justice because he likes to see justice prevail; but rather than be tormented by the importunity of a widow in trouble he will grant it.

Now, God is neither a lukewarm friend nor an unjust judge. He is a being of intense love, and intense justice. And shall not he, out of the plenitude of love, and justice, and mercy, do that which you can extract even from such impure human sources, from such low motives? "Shall he not avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily."

In both ways, then, it is argued by the Saviour. From showing how much goodness and kindness can be got out of a man's bad nature, it is argued how much of these qualities can be got out of a man's good nature, and from a man's good nature; it is argued how much richer God is in those directions. If we do so much, how much more will he do? If we have the products of the temperate zone out of our half developed affections, God is tropical, eternal summer.

So, then, we have in the actual use which Christ makes of human nature an ample warrant for employing it ourselves, and for inferring from it the divine nature, and the divine government, and the divine disposition, and the whole love of divine grace. We are to make these inferences, not from our inferior experiences, but from the best parts of the human soul, acting in its best moods, and in its noblest ways.

In framing our ideas, then, we are at liberty to take these best things in man as our guide—not man's institutions, but man himself; not what man has with ignorance, and with blundering processes, raked up for himself as methods of procedure, but his own highest qualities of soul.

What is human society? It is a vast inchoate mass on its way toward a higher state, full of expedients and experiments and mistakes. And the necessity of government is everywhere apparent. But the methods of government are everywhere empirical and wretchedly imperfect. So that government has never done very much for the world. By *government*, I mean civil government—the government of nations—the government of the masses. It may be safely said to be a question for debating societies, whether nations have not suffered from the imperfections and corruptions of government as much as they have been benefited by its protection and general wisdom.

Although we may infer some things of the divine nature, although we may help our conceptions of the divine government somewhat, by the consideration of human governments, yet neither monarchies nor magistrates are the true or appropriate ideals from which we are to infer the nature of the divine Being. It is the individual heart, and it is the individual heart in those relations that develop true affection, that is the moral from which we are to infer the divine nature.

We need not fear, then, that we shall exaggerate the divine excellence. We never can concieve it sufficiently. Men often think, "Oh, if my father were here, he would do so and so." Why do you not go to God? "Well," you answer, "he is divine." Yes, he is di-

vine; but not in the sense that he is *less* good than your father. He is not visible as your father is, he does not speak as your father speaks, he does not touch your hand as your father touches it; but in so far as that which constitutes the goodness of your father to you, God is unspeakably more than your father is. He is richer in heart, purer in sympathy, and more continuous in his desires and yearnings for you, than any earthly parent can be. His goodness exhibits itself to your senses. It may, however, be apprehended by your spiritual insight and faith.

Men feel that they are to go to their fellow men for thousands of things, and to God for their salvation. They feel that they must go to their fellow men for all helpful ways, and suggestions, and counsels, and sympathy; but the attempt to carry the minutiæ of our lives into the presence of our God, we think would be preposterous. Yet he is concerned with the universe; with all his outlying kingdom. Nay, because he is God, he is able to take in the universal love of God. The minutest things are known to him. The very hairs of your head are numbered. And not one of the sparrows that hop and leap on the leafless trees of the boughs about your house shall fall without God's knowing it. But are ye not more valuable than many sparrows?

In a sad hour I have seen, through the window, mounted on a rail back of my house, one of these curious-eyed little sparrows. And he was a better preacher to me than I am to you. It was winter, and there was not guaranteed to it one day's food, nor any protection, from any source in this world. It was wholly dependent upon its God. And yet it sang—sang for its own hearing, and sang for my rebuke, saying to me, "Are you not much better than I? and God thinks of me, and takes care of me." How much there is in the voice of nature if we only knew how to interpret it!

You will ask, "If, then, this be the source from which we are to derive our ideas of God, and if he is so full of love, and his kindness is so inexhaustible, why is it so difficult for us to find him? I reply that the divine nature can only be made known to us through that part of our nature which is like his. You cannot imitate silence by making a noise. You cannot make a man have sweet tastes by giving him sour or bitter. You cannot take an opaque stone, and with it illustrate the transparency of glass or a diamond. You cannot by darkness imitate light. You must have the quality itself that you wish to make known. If that which in God is so precious were a material thing, then it might be made known to us through material organizations; but as God is infinite in love, and beauty, and wisdom, and glory, and excellence, he is to be known to us in these

elements by the actual possession of the qualities themselves, as windows through which the light of heaven shines. The windows in us are to be like the heavenly windows; and the knowledges that come to us are to be brought out from the very chords which are in our bosom, and which vibrate in us.

We are asking God to reveal himself to the eye; and no man can see him. We are asking God to reveal himself through the ear. We are asking another personal incarnation. We are asking an impossible thing. We are asking that through material elements alone we may have made known to us God, who is not matter. He is formless, he is the superlative center of things effluent, and potential, and universal; and our knowledge of him depends upon our having something of those qualities as a medium through which shall stream divine influence and divine feeling, and as a foundation idea on which we may reason up to the divine Being.

I do not believe any man was ever lifted up to a greater enthusiasm of self-denial and goodness, but if he did but know it, he had some perception of what goes to constitute the divine nature. When a man comes into that transcendent experience in which he sacrifices himself consciously for fidelity and benefaction, out of these noble and heroic moods of mind emerge the very highest conceptions which the soul ever frames. It is in these higher moods that we discern God—not in the lower ones.

Even that part of the mind which is capable of understanding God must be brought up to a high degree of sensibility, or it will not receive the impressions of the divine nature and spirit.

The plate put into the camera, in order that it may receive the picture from nature must be sensitive. The daguerrean-plate, before it is used, is prepared by chemicals, so that when the light strikes it there shall be an impression made upon it of the object to be represented. It is carefully hidden from the light until everything is ready, and then, when the slide is drawn, and the image is reflected upon the sensitive surface, the picture is secured, and only then.

Now, in regard to our conception of God, we are much of the time in a dull, clouded state in our upper faculties. We live a great deal in our lower nature. Our animal nature, for the most part, is in the ascendant. By a sudden impulse we are at times enabled to lift ourselves up so as to see some faint conception of God; but when the interpreting part of our nature is dulled and dimmed, how can we have any interpretation of God in his spiritual feelings? If these are clouded and undeveloped, where is the medium by which we shall discern those things which belong to the divine nature.

In Italy, there were in other times, when oppression had worse sway, many men in dungeons. They were doomed to live in darkness summer and winter, and for many years, without seeing the light of the sun. All the glory of the Italian seasons poured upon their prison; but they never knew whether it was night or day. Down in the depths of their loathsome dungeons no flowers blossomed and no birds sang. Nothing butspiders and their victims crawled in the dank atmosphere in which they lived; and they knew nothing of the wealth which rolled over them—enough for them there was, and for myriads more, but untouched and unused. And all the bounty and glory of the divine nature rolls over men who are imprisoned down deep in the dungeons of animalism in themselves—in the sensualities and materialities of their physical lives. And when the upper part of their being—that realm where there is percipience and spiritual existence—is dark and unoccupied, they being down dungeon deep, is it strange that God is not interpreted to them?

Nay more: if you take one in the care and anxiety and annoyance of business, when his mind is perplexed and fevered and fretted, and ask him, "What do you think of Beethoven's Symphonies?" He says, "Do not talk to me about Beethoven's Symphonies. I have something to think of besides music." When the other part of the mind is exercised, the musical faculties are not, and cannot be, in a recipient state. Or, if a man comes to you when you are busily engaged in preparing a children's Christmas tree, and propounds to you a mathematical problem, you say, "Away with your figures. What do I care for them now?" He is not in a fit condition for solving such problems. His mind does not run that way. When you want him to work at arithmetic, go to him when he is in the right frame of mind for it, and not when he is in a mood for frolicking with children.

It is a misery for grief to hear laughter; and when one is in a laughing mood, it is misery for him to hear wails. And we understand how a man must be in a poetic mood to enjoy poetry. A man today goes into an art gallery, and says, "I do not think much of those pictures." It is not surprising that he does not; for he was out all last night, and could not well be in a condition to appreciate pictures. In order to enjoy music, or poetry, or pictures, we must be in a certain state of faculty which is adapted to receive and appreciate them.

Now, is it not much more so in regard to the great spiritual elements of God's kingdom? Is it not reasonable to suppose that they cannot be understood when the faculties of the mind are in a low,

dead, cold, condition? And is it not the testimony all through the New Testament that they who seek God shall find him when they seek him with all their heart? Does not the command sound out from the New Testament, "Strive to enter in; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, but shall not be able"? How can you enter into poetry, music, or eloquence, when you are in a carnal mood? How can a selfish person enter into the sweetness of benevolence? How can hatred enter into the joy of love? How can any man enter into the higher experiences with which we are familiar except by the intensity, the whetting edge, of the faculty to which those experiences appeal? And is it not the testimony of the New Testament, that if you would see God you must be pure in heart?

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God?" "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

In other words, interpreting it in modern phrase, if you would see God, you must be in those moods on which seeing God essentially depend; and those moods must be acuminated, sensitized, lifted to higher forms. Then in them you will discern God.

Now, tell me, you who complain that there is no God for you in the world, you who are skeptical, and doubt whether Christians are not under illusions, and whether there is anything in Christianity, tell me, have you ever been pressed out of all measure by fear, by grief, by sorrow, by remorse? Have you ever felt that you had gone to the furthermost bound of human endurance, when it seemed as though flesh must fail? And have you never in that moment been able to look up, and feel, "Lord God, help!"? Has not need ever interpreted succor? Have there never been moments when in rare exaltation you have had a conception of supernal kindness? Have there never been moments of meditation, of rapture, or poetry, or whatever you please to call it, out of which you have interpreted the divine nature? You are disposed to call those moments abnormal; but they are the truest moments of all your experiences. You are disposed to call them artificial, poetic, exaggerated periods; but they are the periods when you come the nearest to the point of actual being—the nearest to the realm where the great truths of creation are.

There is something more under God's eye and thought, I take it, than the terraqueous globe. There is something else, besides stars and constellations. There is something more than physical qualities and material structures. The realm of truth is a realm of thoughts, of volitions, of affections, and of great potency in spiritual things. As God is infinite in goodness and long-suffering, glorious in patience, full of transcendent and supernal mercies, so in the

great realm of being there is sentiment, aspiration, faith, hope and love. Everything is relative in this world; but the apostle, in the particular view he took, saw three great absolute, universal permanencies—Faith, Hope and Love. All prophecies, all gifts, all methods of education, all outward instrumentalities, pass away, but these great moral elements still remain. These are substantial forms. The realm in which they exist is the realm of heavenly truth. Heaven is where beauty, and sweetness, and purity, and virtue, and love are; and where the self-sacrifice of love and the fruitfulness of love abound, they shake down their fruit, and are as the trees of life growing by the river of water. These are the attributes of God. And he who rises into moods in which he can comprehend them, and abides in them, and gives fervor and power to them, is in a recipient state, and can communicate with the divine Being. But in the lower moods he cannot communicate with him. It is the want of spiritual sensitiveness that prevents this communion in the cases of many men.

Here we have, then, Christian brethren, an explanation, if this be considered in some sort an explanation, of our own experiences. We have an explanation of how it is that without a gush of faith and joy and trust in God we are in such a state of mind that God's shining does not reach our hearts. Not that he does not shine at all times; but we are beyond the reach of his influence. The sun shines upon the slated roof and upon the closed shutters at all times when it is unclouded; but it is only in those fortunate hours or moments when the door stands open, or the blinds are thrown back, that the light streams through into the inward dwelling, though it might stream through at other times if they were open at other times.

So it is with the influence of God in its relations to men. It is shed around about them all the time; but the soul is shut to which it would manifest itself, and therefore that soul cannot have a realization of it. The condition through which it might be brought to the consciousness is wanting.

This is one of the reasons why we are enjoined by the Apostle to pray always, and to pray without ceasing. This is one of the reasons why we are exhorted to fervency of spirit. This is one of the reasons of the cogency of the exhortations in the New Testament. It is only in the higher states that we can perceive and accept the divine presence and the divine blessing; and when we are in those states we interpret God in accordance with them, and no longer by the hand, or foot, or stomach, or by society outside of us.

We interpret God, then, by the best, the noblest, the divinest ele-

ments that are in us—by that part of our nature which is like God's. And that which interprets God to us is to make us sons of God. Interpreted thus, God is love. But interpreted by the lower senses, and by selfish society relations, God is a King, with a sceptre. Interpreted by the best part of your nature, which has the nearest commerce with God, and which comes the nearest to spelling out his attributes rightly, the word of God is a revelation of the divine nature. In that word we learn that God is love; and that perfect love casts out fear. When we find that out, we are very near to him. And they are the most orthodox, the best in disposition, and the most richly endowed in spiritual elements, who live nearest to God, and are most like him—understanding him, not by the intellect, but by the soul. For the heart is greater than the head.

That we may all of us come into this communion is devoutly to be desired; but alas! we spend so much of our time and strength upon our lower nature, that little is left for the higher. We live so much for lower joy that the higher joy is scarcely missed. We live so entirely for the body that to the soul there is no God, no Friend. Only they can see him who, by becoming like him, and by the intensity of their likeness to him, are brought into those moods through which God streams into the soul, and stamps his image on their being.

May God grant to every one of us this power of vision, this faith which works by love, and purifies the soul.

And now, my Christian brethren, to help our faith, to assist us in this communion, we shall gather again, in a moment, around about the table on which are the emblems of the body of Christ broken, and the blood of Christ spilled. Think not of these carnal elements; think not of the body nor of the blood. Think of that love, that sympathy, that self-sacrifice, that holy fervor of desire for others, which made Christ what he was. The body is merely the hint of what he suffered and of what he did by suffering. It is the door by which we enter into the inward life of Christ—into the greatness, the glory, and the power of his self-sacrificing life. And with that mood, in taking the bread and the wine, take also to yourselves the same life, with prayers for help, and with prayers for forgiveness. So commune with Christ through your better and nobler qualities that, going hence, you shall feel, "I know my God; I am known of him; and henceforth the life that I live in the flesh, I will live by faith of him who loved me, and gave himself for me."

I do not invite the members of this church alone, nor the mem-

bers of the Christian Church alone, to commune with us: I invite Christians, whether they are in church relations or out of church relations. I invite all those who feel themselves to be sinful, and to need forgiveness. I invite all those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and are willing to avow before men that they trust in Christ, and in his love and mercy, for salvation. If it would comfort and strengthen you to partake of these emblems with us, joining in our prayers and sacred songs, I invite you, not by the authority of church, but by virtue of your personal relations of faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. On these grounds I invite you to participate in this celebration of the Saviour's living, and dying, and again living love and mercy.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

Our Father, we thank thee that thou hast gathered, in every age, those that loved thee and sought each other's welfare; and that thou hast had a holy household—a family of faith—brethren beloved. And though sometimes it has been dwindled and scattered, and almost gone, we rejoice that there has always been a seed, and in these latter days the harvest waves abundantly; and that in every land there are those who lift up holy hands to thee, and hearts that love, and trust, and rejoice in the Lord their God. We thank thee that thou hast granted unto us the sight of so many who have turned from selfishness and sordidness, and from this world as their whole good, to thee, and have found in their trouble the Lord a present Helper, in their darkness the Lord their Light, and in their sorrow the Lord their Comforter. We thank thee that thou hast manifested thyself unto thy people, so that by the things that are not, or are invisible, we have been able to overcome the things that are; and that the power and might of this invisible kingdom augment grace, and make it stronger and stronger.

We thank thee for all those who have been gathered into this church; for all who have borne faithfully a witness for Christ, and have at last been called home. How great is the number of those who are above us! How great is the number of those whose songs roll over our heads unheard, and yet are full of melody and joy! And others are passing on, and going thither continually. We thank thee for so many as yet remain, and by their labor, by their patience, by their faith, by their prayers, and by their fidelity, are witnesses for Christ. And we thank thee that there are so many still who are being gathered into the relationship of brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let all those who, this morning, have been brought into the communion and fellowship of this church feel that they are beloved of God, and that they may have in themselves the witness of thy divine Spirit. May they be able, not so much to lean upon outward things, as through these outward things to find their way to the throne of all grace and mercy. And day by day may they live in the hope and joy of the love of God. May they never be in such night that they cannot find their way to thee; nor in such trouble that they shall not be able to break up from beneath it into thy presence. May their winters be short, and their summers long. Grant that they may bring forth abundant fruit to the honor and glory of God.

And we pray that thou wilt look in great compassion upon those who have been looking wistfully upon this solemn scene and service, long meaning, long hesitating, long yearning for the privilege of Christian life, and yet doubtful. O Lord, we pray that thou wilt speak comfortably to them, and interpret thy will to them, and give them strength to do things that shall confirm them in the faith, and that shall bring more and more the power of God upon their hearts and upon their lives.

We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all those who are members of this church. May they find access to thee every day in prayer. And as the years roll on, may they know that they are preparing for heaven. May their thought of joy rise continually. May they have the power of heaven ministered unto them. May they know that God is precious through Jesus Christ to their souls. May they be able to avail themselves of thy strength and presence through thy providence in life. May they more and more feel that death is vanquished. And as they shall draw near, one by

* Immediately following the reception of members into the church.

one, to the valley and shadow of death, may they fear no evil, and may they awake in thine image, and rejoice forever with the Lord.

Bless, O Lord, the labor of thy servants' hands. May all those who go forth to sow seed, sow in good ground, and not be discouraged. We pray that thou wilt multiply the self-denying labors of those who have denied themselves in labor hitherto. And may no man count himself his own; nor his time; nor his power. We are bought with a price. Whether we live or die, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. And grant that we may know the preciousness of this truth; and the Author of it. May all our powers be consecrated to the service of God, so that from day to day we may witness for Christ.

Grant that there may be found many who shall go forth among the poor and the needy, as there have been in the days past, to succor, to instruct, to comfort, to strengthen. And we pray that the power of this church in good works may be greatly increased.

Bless our schools and our Bible classes, and all the means that are employed among us for the evangelization of those who are in ignorance, and in unbelief. May there be given to teachers, and to superintendents, a great power from on high.

Bless all our social relations; all our rejoicings together; all our meetings for prayer, and exhortation, and labor. And grant that everything may be sanctified, and the Spirit of God may dwell in us, and in all our assemblings, that we may not gather together after the way of the world, nor with formality, but with the power of the Spirit, and with the fullness of the blessedness of the love of Jesus Christ in our souls.

We pray for those who are benighted; for those who are reluctant to perform their whole duty; for those who find it not easy to cut off the right hand, or to pluck out the right eye; for all those who come to thee, but will not take thy yoke, or bear thy burden.

We pray that thou wilt revive thy work in this congregation; that many may be brought out of darkness into light; that long-delayed duty may at last be fulfilled; and that men may rise up in this beginning year to take a new course, to enter upon a higher life—to make a noble consecration of themselves.

May thy kingdom be advanced in all thy churches. Wilt thou grant thy ministering servants more grace from on high, and more power in the proclamation of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. And we pray that the love of Christ may rise higher and higher to subdue all other influences; and that by love and sympathy with thee men may be united; and that all thy churches may join hands, that they may advance with unbroken front against the iniquity which is in the world, and for the spread of the divine spirit, and the blessings of thy kingdom.

Now, Lord, we pray that thou wilt bless us in the still further waiting upon thee; in all the services of the sanctuary. Bless us this day in our homes. Kindle in our dwellings the light of thy presence, and the joy of thy salvation. Be with us as long as we live. And when heart and flesh shall fail, fail not thou, but be our Light, our Convoy, our exceeding great Joy in the hour of departure; and receive us into thy heavenly kingdom, through riches of grace, in Christ Jesus. *Amen.*

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